

Bureau of Land Management
Northeast California Resource Advisory Council
Field Tour and Meeting
June 13-14, 2012, Cedarville, California

Summary Minutes

June 13

Council members toured recently acquired lands in the Homecamp Area. At Boulder Reservoir and Divine Springs they discussed proposed recreation site improvement projects. They also discussed proposed grazing management strategies. The lands were acquired through the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

June 14

Vice Chairman Skip Willmore convened the meeting at 8 a.m.

Attendance

Category One: Ken McGarva, John Erquiaga, Jack Razzeto, Skip Willmore. Absent: Todd Swickard.

Category Two: Frank Bayham, Judy Oliver, Louise Jensen, Gale Dupree, Alan Cain.

Category Three: Brad Hansen, Sean Curtis, Carol Montgomery. Absent: Nancy Huffman, Jim Chapman.

There is a quorum.

BLM Staff: District Manager Nancy Haug, Eagle Lake Field Manager Ken Collum, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke (also acting field manager for Surprise), Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Guests: Jackie McGarva, Likely; Carla Bowers, Volcano.

Opening Business

Vice Chair Skip Willmore chaired the meeting in Nancy's absence.

Approvals: The agenda for this meeting was approved. The minutes from the February meeting were approved.

Field Tour Comments

Tim asked for comments and suggestions about proposed recreation developments at Boulder Reservoir and Divine Campground, and proposals for temporary non-renewable grazing use or trailing permit grazing use on the acquired Homecamp lands. RAC comments:

- Ken McGarva: There should be more irrigation in the meadows at mare field. Work should be undertaken on irrigation system improvements for the meadows.
- Skip Willmore and Ken repeated comments made during the field tour that grazing stubble height should be less than six inches to keep the grasses healthy and to prevent rodent damage. The lower grass height also attracts more birds. John Erquiaga said grazing is far preferable to burning.
- Carol Montgomery questioned the rationale for campsite development at Boulder Reservoir. She said remote camping areas should be left undeveloped, and that users are generally respectful of primitive use areas and refrain from littering and damage. Developed camping spaces, vault toilets and other developments would make the area less desirable for those who prefer a primitive camping experience.
- Frank Bayham agreed that fencing cattle out of the reservoir is a good idea. He said campground development would detract from the dispersed recreation experience. A fence and water trough project to manage cattle would protect the cultural site at the reservoir.
- Louise Jensen: Fencing the lake is a good environmental idea to protect the water quality of the reservoir. Redirecting the water for cattle use would be a good idea.
- Gale Dupree: Supported fencing cattle away from the reservoir. A pit toilet is a good idea to prevent pollution from human waste. Fire rings would help prevent spread of indiscriminate fire rings and camping areas. BLM should visit the primitive campsites on the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge and ask users there what they prefer in primitive camping areas.

Tim noted there are proposals to dredge the pond and cap the archaeological site.

- Frank suggested there should be more archaeological testing before those projects are done. It would provide information on the extent and quality of the cultural resource information there.
- Skip agreed that the site should be left in a primitive condition. It is too remote to put much money into. Development would require more money and staff time for maintenance.

State Director's Report

Nancy Haug delivered a statewide status report from State Director Jim Kenna:

- **Leadership Team in Washington/State Office:** BLM Director Bob Abbey has retired as of May 31, 2012. Associate Director Mike Pool has assumed the Acting Director role beginning June 1.
- **Legislative** – Just six months remaining in the 112th Congress. Focus still remains on jobs and the economy. It's going to be a busy summer for the California delegation as they prepare for election season. We expect some changes in Congressional districts in the Northeast part of the state with Congressman Herger retiring and the redistricting of the new District 01.
- **Hill Visits Recap** - The State Director recently completed his annual trip to Washington to brief Congressionals. Jim met with 13 members/staffs of the California delegation including Senators Feinstein and Boxer and Representatives Herger (CA-2) and McClintock (CA-4). Jim emphasized BLM-CA priority issues (new energy frontier, sage grouse conservation, economic benefits to communities and America's Great Outdoors. He also discussed BLM-CA emphasis on sustainability, heritage and community. Overall he received positive feedback about BLM-CA and the good work by field offices and many partners.
- **Budget** – The FY2012 funding level for BLM-CA was \$1,127,839 million compared to the FY2013 request of \$1,127,335.
- **BLM Priorities:** Our priorities continue to be renewable energy and America's Great Outdoors, including the National Landscape Conservation System, youth initiatives and recreation. Sustainability, Heritage, Community.
- **Wild Horse and Burro** – Adoption season is underway. An adoption in Clovis earlier this month resulted in the adoption of seven horses and one burro.
- **Promoting Economic Growth** BLM-California is an engine of economic activity and raises more revenue each year for American taxpayers than it spends. Special areas bring tourism dollars to local communities, and royalties for use of public lands amount to millions of dollars each year.
 - BLM-California brings in \$117 million in oil and gas royalties, \$1.8 million from wind projects, and \$8.6 million from geothermal projects statewide each year
 - Approved solar projects will contribute nearly \$23 million in annual rent and royalties, once built out

District Manager's Report

For the Northern California District, Nancy updated the group on the status of management changes in the Surprise Field Office, and development of conservation strategies for sage grouse west-wide, including involvement of local governments in developing management alternatives. A sage grouse decision to amend land use plans is due by September 2014.

Surprise Field Office Management: Nancy told the RAC that Allen Bollschweiler had taken a position in Grants Pass, Oregon, as field manager. For the foreseeable future, she has assigned Tim Burke, Alturas field manager to oversee the Surprise Field Office. Nancy has also asked Tim to assess workload and staffing at the Surprise Field Office as well as the Alturas office and determine if there are ways to achieve efficiencies.

John Erquiaga said that this looks like an attempt to close the Cedarville office. Nancy responded that no decisions have been made and that is not a consideration at this point. She said that the BLM is taking this opportunity to see if there are areas where we can share workload or staffing. She also said that Tim would be talking with our partners and the counties about the ongoing work and partnerships and possibilities for future management of the two offices.

Sage Grouse: Nancy reminded the group that the BLM's development of sage grouse conservation strategies will result in amendment to the Alturas, Eagle Lake and Surprise resource management plans. Because they were completed in 2008 she said they are in "fairly good shape" regarding conservation of sage grouse habitat. There will likely be some changes, however.

Monitoring Program: Nancy also reported on the soil, water and air monitoring project involving Utah State University. The RAC heard information on the topic at their February meeting. The work is designed to develop quantitative data upon which to base defensible livestock grazing decisions for all three northeast California field offices.

Wild Horse and Burro Management

Nancy Haug reported:

Director's Challenge Project: The Eagle Lake and Surprise field offices were allocated \$25,000 in the Director's Challenge Initiative to support volunteer work to gather data on resource conditions in wild horse and burro herd management areas. Volunteers will work in the Twin Peaks, High Rock and Nut Mountain HMAs. BLM can help cover volunteer expenses. The volunteer announcement has been posted online at Volunteer.gov, announced through the news media and through other venues.

Alan Cain, who represents wild horse and burro interests, said he likes the idea of providing opportunities for people to study range conditions first hand. Volunteers will also have the chance to learn about range effects of horse populations.

Upcoming Gathers: Nancy also reported that the Surprise Field Office is working on a range of alternatives in an environmental assessment being prepared for the proposed Coppersmith, Buckhorn and Carter Reservoir gathers. Coppersmith and Buckhorn are anticipated this fall; Carter is proposed for next summer. The environmental assessment will be released soon for public comment.

Sean Curtis urged the BLM to consider the ability to help the Modoc National Forest with their plans to gather the Devil's Garden herd territory.

Carol Montgomery suggested that the RAC should receive more information on actions and recommendations of the national Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board. Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana agreed to forward information on web links to current information as it becomes available.

Action: The RA unanimously recommended that its wild horse and burro subcommittee (Todd Swickard, Alan Cain, Sean Curtis and Chair Nancy Huffman) review the EA for the upcoming Surprise Field Office gathers and develop recommendations for the full RAC. A RAC conference call, open to the public, should be scheduled for the RAC review of the recommendations.

Medicine Lake Geothermal Development

Tim Burke updated the council on the history and current status of proposals for geothermal leasing and development in the Medicine Lake Highlands in Siskiyou County. Leases were first issued in the 1970s, and development projects for 49-megawatt power plants at locations called Telephone Flat and Four Mile Hill were approved by the BLM and Forest Service in the 1990s. Subsequent court actions invalidated the leases at the Four Mile Hill project site. The development company, Calpine Corp., is now proposing developing at least one 49-megawatt power plant at the Four Mile Hill project site, and is considering the possibility of developing up to 480 megawatts of geothermal power in the entire Known Geothermal Resource Area (KGRA). The BLM will need to complete new environmental analysis to extended the leases, an action that is required if the company is to pursue development plans. The company has not yet informed the BLM about its preferred course of action.

During the previous environmental analysis on proposed developments there was opposition from Native American tribes, environmental groups and a homeowners association at Medicine Lake. There was also support expressed.

Legal questions remain about the validity of leasing at the Telephone Flat project site.

The item was informational only. The RAC took no action.

Infernal Caverns Acquisition

Tim discussed the historic significance of the 1868 battle site in the Likely area where local tribes and settlers clashed. The site contains memorial markers for the six U. S. Cavalry members who died.

Mitigation funds from the Reno-Alturas Intertie powerline project were used to buy part of the property and it was donated to the BLM for management. An adjacent parcel is privately owned; BLM is negotiating acquisition. There are mitigation funds still available that could be used.

Discussions and negotiations are continuing about possible acquisition, including the possibility of a land exchange.

Eagle Lake Field Office Projects

Ken Collum updated the council on the status of two projects:

Horse Lake Wind: Invenergy has submitted a plan of development for a 50-megawatt wind energy development on Fredonyer Peak, near Horse Lake, east of Eagle Lake. The environmental review process has not yet begun. The field office has advised the company about concerns with proposed wind turbine locations within priority sage grouse habitat, where developments must follow BLM's interim guidance for habitat conservation. BLM has asked the company for an alternative that includes turbine placement outside of grouse habitat to avoid conflicts with interim sage grouse habitat management.

The Eagle Lake Field Office also asked the company for more extensive analysis of bald eagle and golden eagle use of the project area to determine possible wind energy impacts on the birds. Another year of analysis could be required.

The BLM will not move forward with environmental analysis until the two requirements are met.

Bly Tunnel: There is no water flowing from the tunnel. The field office closed a controversial bypass valve last February. There has been no action on five appeals filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, including one request for a stay of the BLM action.

Public Comments

Carla Bowers: Presented information on allocation of forage allocation to wild horses and burros, wildlife and livestock. She stressed that nationally, wildlife receive 51 percent, livestock 45 percent and wild horses two percent of available forage. Carla presented several handouts. She said horse numbers are comparatively low compared to wildlife and livestock. She was concerned with BLM aiming for low AML during gathers. If achieve nationwide, she said there will be about 18,000 animals on the range instead of the 26,500 that BLM says is the national AML. She was also concerned that under the BLM's population target 78 percent of wild herds would be under 150 animals, a number that threatens viability. She expressed concern that BLM has not managed wild herds with consideration for protection of their family units. She cited

information from Karen Sussman, president of the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros, in saying that small herd numbers damage the educational structure wild herd family units and leads to higher than normal reproduction rates.

She also recommended that the BLM use more water and bait trapping, particularly for smaller herds, where there is a need to gather excess animals.

Carla also summarized a proposal for a special management approach for the Carter Reservoir Herd that roams public land east of Cedarville. She noted these horses have "old world" Spanish markers, making them unique. She was concerned with the low AML currently in place, and said it is important to increase the AML to preserve the line of horses. At a minimum, she said the currently population level of 55 should be maintained.

She expressed support for expanding HMAs west wide and said wild horse activists are interested in working with Congress to expand ranges. Carla expressed support for cooperation among wild horse interests and livestock operators.

Public Land Access Issues

Skip Willmore said some of his constituents are concerned that agencies are closing down road access to public lands. Sean Curtis noted that the BLM took a more user friendly approach to travel route designations than did the Forest Service when it established travel route designations in the Alturas, Surprise and Eagle Lake resource management plans.

Skip said there are constituent concerns that closures would extend to BLM-managed lands. Managers said there are no efforts underway to expand route designations beyond those contained in the resource management plans.

There was discussion about management of public lands that are surrounded by private lands, and processes that can be used to address the issue. Managers said the process differs by location and access issues are addressed on a case by case basis. In some cases, the BLM negotiates for public access to isolated parcels. They can also be designated for disposal from public ownership or retained for various natural resource values.

Socio-Economic Draft Strategy

The RAC reviewed the BLM's draft national socioeconomic strategy developed earlier this year. Members received copies in advance.

Nancy Haug summarized that BLM capability in socioeconomic analysis has declined over the years, while need for the analysis has become increasingly important. This draft strategy is recognition of this, and an attempt by the BLM to increase capability in analyzing socioeconomic effects of its land management decisions.

RAC Comments:

Sean Curtis: The RAC should have had the opportunity to comment on the goals and strategies - the meat and potatoes of the document. Ideally, socio-economic data should be as important in BLM decision making as the natural resource data. BLM decisions can have dramatic local socio-economic impacts, but these effects would be insignificant on a national basis. Analysis of socioeconomic data needs to be part of the decision-making process rather than just a box to be checked. What is missing now is the ability to interpret socio-economic data collected during planning. There are sources of data, but it needs to be interpreted in context. BLM needs to better analyze long range and broad socioeconomic implications of its decisions. For example, how a local school system would be impacted by as a result of widespread reductions in federal land livestock grazing. Aside from this draft report, socioeconomic data is needed for local communities to make the case for the importance of commodity based programs.

Louise Jensen: There has to be flexibility to customize this for local communities. That layering to create a local toolbox for socioeconomic analysis does not appear to exist here. There is no good modeling to measure unintended consequences of an action. The BLM needs to have control over the modeling and the data that are used. It would be important that all field offices used the same standards for modeling and data analysis. The data collected has to be easily used by staff.

Frank Bayham: Good socioeconomic information is important in BLM decision making. He was concerned that this document is a prelude to restructuring of the BLM in some way, positioning political and economic considerations above other needs and thus impacting the agency's natural resource expertise and capability on the ground. It appears this could become a major entity within the BLM. There is value in some of the information addressed in the document. He said expertise is sometimes needed to gather the correct information in the correct way to be most useful in an agency decision making process. In principle he supports the document, but feels it is too loaded with unnecessary specifics.

Judy Oliver: She feels the BLM is doing socio-economic work already, but doesn't doubt more data could be used. She suggested there are outside sources of information and data collection, such as universities. She sees this as a response to BLM's need to address increasing competition for rangeland use and resources.

Jack Razzeto: Jack questioned whether the socioeconomic data will really affect the agency decision making process.

Ken McGarva: It will cost money to hire people to study the topic and there is no money to take care of what we have now. This looks like a plan to spend more money.

Skip Willmore: The BLM appears to be "fishing" to do something it does not need to do. There is BLM expertise on the ground to answer the socioeconomic questions.

Action: The RAC unanimously agreed to consolidate their opinions in several statements, as follows:

-- The document writing is not clear, too complex. The document is jargon laden and cryptic which obfuscates the intent.

An example: Some of the tools referenced might not even exist yet.

-- The RAC should have been consulted in development of the document goals and strategies prior to the narrative being developed.

-- An omission: There is no standard among the natural resource agencies about how to measure and analyze socioeconomic data in the context of ecosystem management. This exercise seems premature until there is a standard.

-- Omission: There is no idea or assessment of the costs to the BLM of implementing most of the proposed actions. Specific actions in strategy 2.2 are one example.

-- Omission: There is no BLM commitment expressed to use socioeconomic data in the BLM decision making process.

-- Omission: There is no timeframe for implementation and no indication for a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed actions.

--Omission: Strategy 1.1 needs to include stakeholder involvement. This is solely in-house.

--The RAC had difficulty prioritizing proposed actions because of the notes listed above.

Field Managers' Reports:

Tim Burke presented a written report for the Alturas and Surprise field offices (attached)

Comments/Questions: Tim said he will bring RAC comments on the Boulder Reservoir proposal back to the staff for consideration. For example, he will reflect support for the buck and pole fencing and dredging proposals. He will ensure that the RAC receives a copy of the decision.

Ken Collum reported for the Eagle Lake Field Office (attached)

There were no comments or questions.

Closing Business

Next meeting: November 7-8, Alturas

Location: Field Trip to Little Valley area

Topics Status report on Bly Tunnel, status of Horse Lake Wind proposal, status of sage grouse conservation strategy, updates on proposed wild horse gathers in the Surprise Field Office, update on management of Surprise Field Office, status of Alturas Field Office PG&E lands acquisition, status of Medicine Lake geothermal development proposals, update on Homecamp decision/Boulder Reservoir project.

*Summary notes compiled by
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